DHAKA THURSDAY DECEMBER 12, 2024, *AGRAHAYAN 27, 1431 BS* | A PUBLICATION OF The Daily Star

CAMPUS

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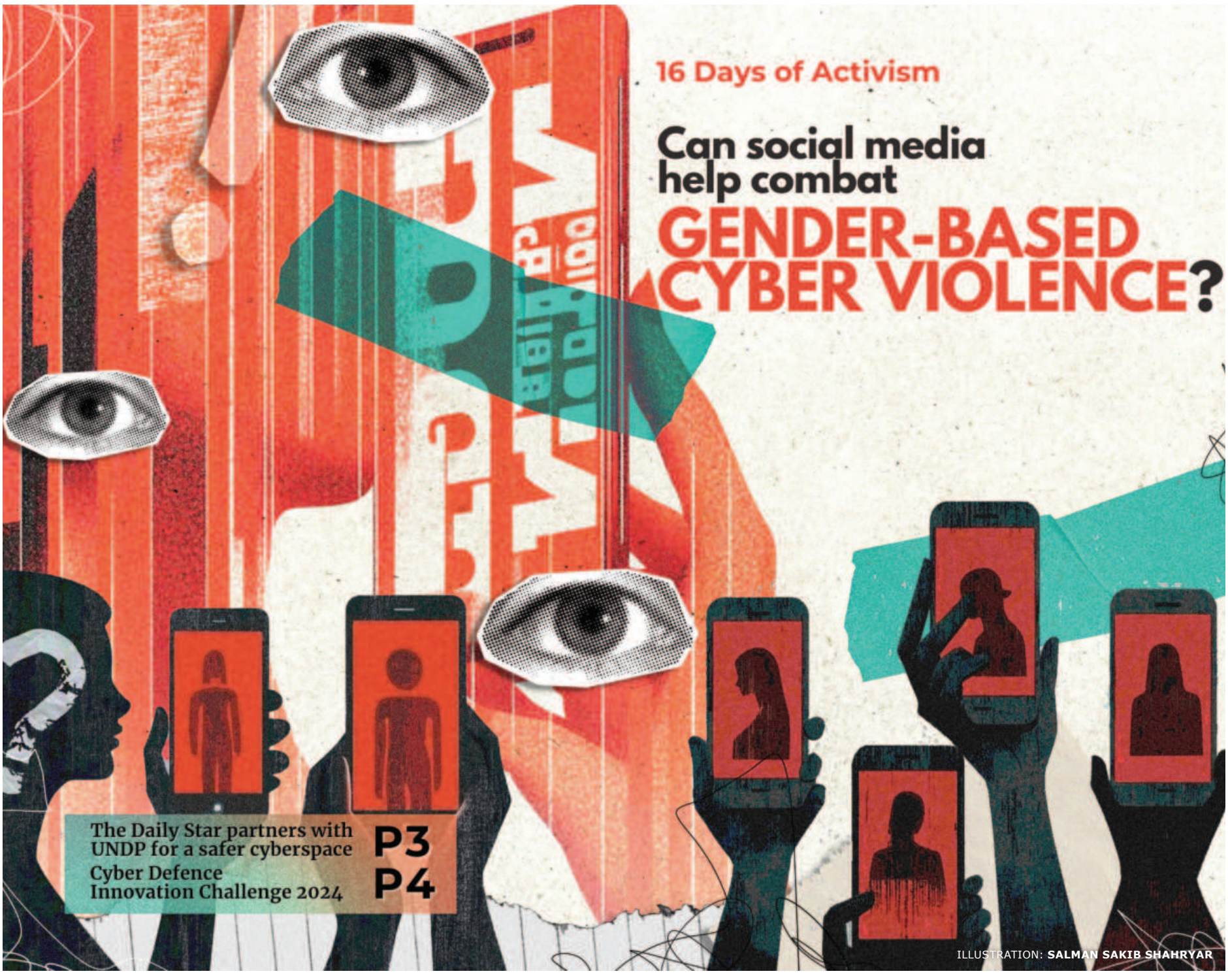

ILLUSTRATION: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

The Daily Star partners with UNDP for a safer cyberspace **P3**
Cyber Defence Innovation Challenge 2024 **P4**

ANIME

ARCANE SEASON TWO

A glorious, yet anticlimactic evolution

ZABIN TAZRIN NASHITA

Colourful. Chaotic. Captivating.

These three words sum up the TV show adaptation of Riot Games' multiplayer battle arena video game *League of Legends* (*LoL*) quite well. *Arcane* captured hearts upon its release in 2021, boasting stunning animation and intricate storylines featuring beloved champions from the game. As such, the announcement of *Arcane* season two led to it becoming one of the most anticipated TV shows of the year.

Season two, released in three parts, concluded on November 23, 2024. Act I picks up the story from where it left off in season one. It is a beautiful mess of colours and mayhem with immersive battle sequences and seamless blend of various art and animation styles including hand-drawn charcoal frames. However, the pacing is a bit rushed. New arcs and faces enter the scene one after another amidst an already complex political power play, making it hard to keep up.

Act II, on the other hand, is the epitome of masterful storytelling. A much-needed respite from the exhilarating roller coaster ride of Act I, it takes a deep dive into the characters' heart-wrenching pasts. Reminiscent of the storytelling in the first season, the raw emotions of this act hit exactly where it hurts.

The final act of *Arcane* starts with what is possibly my favourite episode of the entire season. Episode seven messes with your feelings in all the right ways as it takes you down a path of what could have been, before brutally tearing you away and throwing you back into reality.

It's at this point that I began wondering, how will the show tie up all the loose ends in two episodes? To tell you the truth, it didn't. Despite the amazing buildup, the ending felt rather underwhelming. The final two episodes progress way too fast, leaving many threads untied and plot holes aplenty. That being said, season two still delivers an enthralling watch, with exciting action sequences and a soundtrack that's nothing short of perfection.

LoL has always had an enthralling lore associated with its world and champions, so the announcement of future shows leaves room for further explanation of *Arcane's* ambiguities.

Editor & Publisher
Mahfuz Anam

Features Editor and Head of Content Marketing
Ehsanur Raza Ronny

Campus In-Charge
Faisal Bin Iqbal

Campus Team
Syeda Afrin Tarannum
Abir Hossain
Adrita Zaima Islam

Photographer
Orchid Chakma

Graphics & Layout
TDS Creative Graphics

Production
Shamim Chowdhury

Send your articles, feedback, and opinion to campus@thedailystar.net
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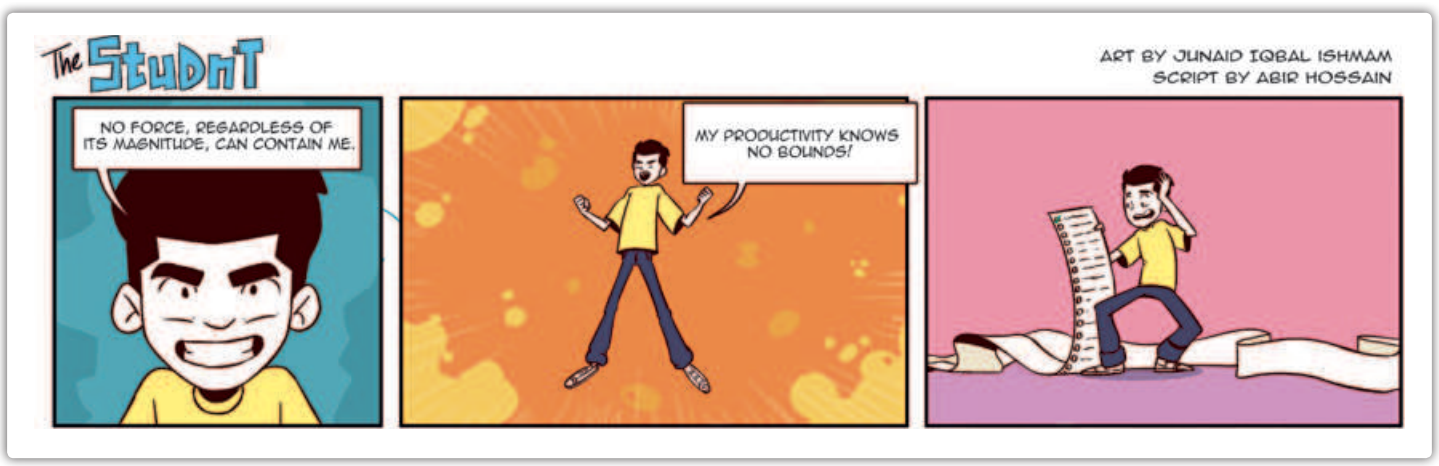


OPPORTUNITIES

IDLC Finance PLC – Network Engineer

ELIGIBILITY

Graduation from a reputed and UGC-approved university.

Preferably 2 to 5 year(s) of experience in a relevant field.

Experience managing/ administrating Microsoft solutions.

Visit apps.idlc.com/career to learn more

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 18

WellDev – Junior Software Engineer (Ruby on Rails)

ELIGIBILITY

BSc in Computer Science, Engineering or relevant fields is an advantage.

At least 1 to 2 years of work experience as a Ruby on Rails developer.

Proven work experience in software development.

Visit welldev.io/careers to learn more.

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 31

Socio Biz 2024 - Social business idea competition

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Teams must have 2 members.

Students from any university in Bangladesh can participate in this competition.

Teams can include students from different Universities.

Visit forms.gle/Wt1ijvcBmU1Aqmda6 to apply.

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 21, 2024

The Daily Star partners with UNDP for

A SAFER CYBER SPACE

MD. ZAHIDUR RABBI

The Daily Star has recently partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to launch a collaborative initiative aimed at promoting cyber safety and fostering innovation in addressing digital threats by featuring the Cyber Defence Innovation Challenge, and a roundtable discussion with key stakeholders from various sectors.

The campaign sought to tackle the vulnerabilities arising from Bangladesh's rapid digital transformation, which, while driving economic progress, has also led to a surge in cyber crimes including hacking, data breaches, and online harassment. Recognising the need for better solutions, the initiative's objectives include raising awareness and engaging young innovators in developing practical and impactful strategies to ensure safer digital spaces.

Cyber Defence Innovation Challenge

A key component of the initiative is the Cyber Defence Innovation Challenge, which took participants through a multi-phase process to generate solutions for critical cyber safety issues. In the first phase, teams of two or three members responded to a cyber safety case study and submitted their proposed solutions. Based on these submissions, five teams were shortlisted for the subsequent phases.

The second phase involved an in-person pitching and briefing session at The Daily Star Centre. Shortlisted teams presented their initial ideas to a panel of judges and received a detailed briefing on the final challenge.

PHOTOS: **STAR**

The final phase of the challenge took the form of an intensive problem-solving exercise. Participants tackled a complex cyber safety case involving multiple stakeholders, such as government officials, law enforcement, tech companies, and community organisations. Teams role-played as these stakeholders and designed solutions that addressed the legal, technological, and societal aspects of the issue. They also participated in a workshop on youth sensitisation against cyber violence, with mentorship provided throughout the process.

Judges evaluated the teams based on criteria including the depth of research, innovation, feasibility, impact, and presentation skills. The most promising solutions were recognised, with the top three teams declared winners.

Roundtable Dialogue on Cyber Safety

In addition to the competition, the campaign featured a roundtable discussion that focused on the broader implications of cyber safety in Bangladesh. The dialogue, which took place on November 25, will bring together policymakers, cybersecurity experts, NGO representatives, members of marginalised communities, and media professionals. The discussion addressed issues such as online violence, particularly against women and vulnerable groups, and explored potential policy reforms and strategies for combating cybercrime.

The roundtable provided a platform for diverse perspectives which facilitated collaboration among stakeholders to create a cohesive approach to digital safety. It also highlighted the critical role of media and advocacy in raising awareness and driving societal change.

This partnership between The Daily Star and UNDP represents a concerted effort to address the escalating challenges of cybercrime in Bangladesh. By engaging the youth, promoting innovation, and fostering dialogue, the collaboration sought to create a safer and more inclusive digital landscape.

Cyber Defence Innovation Challenge 2024

CAMPUS DESK

To combat the growing threat of cybercrimes in Bangladesh, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh and The Daily Star launched a youth-focused campaign to raise awareness and foster innovative solutions that can tackle the growing concerns surrounding cybercrime in the country. The Cyber Defence Innovation Challenge (CDIC) – a multi-phase competition encouraging creative approaches to cyber safety – was a key part of this campaign. Alongside UNDP Bangladesh and The Daily Star, the competition was also supported by the Government of South Korea.

The CDIC was divided into three phases. In Phase 1 – the online challenge – teams of two to three members were asked to submit solutions addressing a specific cyber safety scenario. Based on these submissions, five teams out of 71 were selected for Phase 2 – the initial pitching and briefing round. This phase, which took place at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka, saw the teams present their initial ideas to the judges and receive feedback for the final round.

In Phase 3 – the final challenge – teams tackled a comprehensive cyber safety task, engaging with perspectives from the government and law enforcement officials, tech companies, and community organisations. Participants role-played as various stakeholders to develop impactful solutions. Afterwards, the teams attended a workshop where expert mentors guided them throughout the process.

After the finals, team SSSNUKE were declared the champions of the CDIC 2024. Team Cuet_Cipher_Sirens and team BRACU Cyber Detectives came second and third respectively.

Addressing the guests, participants, and judges of the competition, Mahfuz Anam, the Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star, said, "The cyber world, in a sense, is full of possibilities. At the same time, it's a world full of crime as well, particularly in the case of women who are falling victim to all sorts of cybercrimes. Cybercrimes targeted towards women demoralise them, put them at a disadvantage, and hinder their independence. As a newspaper, we want to stand by their side and ensure that women do not fall victim to cybercrime. In an effort to do that, we have partnered with UNDP on this cyber awareness initiative."

CHAMPION:

SSSNUKE

Team Members: Shakib Izaz Mahmud, Mahdi Mohammad Shibli, Sa Adat Azam Saniat

Team SSSNUKE's analysis of the case studies and the broader landscape of cyber safety awareness in Bangladesh led them to two realisations. First, there is a significant lack of awareness, resources, and understanding of cybersecurity within the country. Second, stigma, societal taboos, and a slow complaint process deter victims from seeking assistance.

Hence, the team's proposed solution to deal with these problems involves the development of a platform that raises comprehensive cybersecurity awareness and allows incident reporting.

The platform offers a gamified learning experience to better understand cyber awareness, on-device security insights, and a searchable knowledge base. It also brings various stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, NGOs, educational institutions, and cybersecurity specialists, under one umbrella within the platform to facilitate a streamlined, stigma-free cybercrime reporting system.

FIRST RUNNER UP:

CUET_CIPHER_SIRENS

Team Members: Sidratul Muntaha and Jannatul Ferdaus

Cybercrimes in Bangladesh often originate from unauthorised access and manipulation of personal data, exposing the vulnerabilities of users with limited digital literacy. This underscores a critical issue: many individuals fall victim to cybercrimes due to a lack of awareness, privacy lapses, and insufficient preventative measures.

Recognising this, team Cuet_Cipher_Sirens aimed to create a safer digital environment by raising cybersecurity awareness, enforcing stricter digital safety protocols, implementing multi-level strategies, and providing robust support systems for victims.

To build a resilient cyber ecosystem, human awareness and technology must work hand in hand. Based on this idea, the team proposed a solution that incorporates both – technologies like AI and blockchain, and workshops and education campaigns to spread awareness.

SECOND RUNNER UP:

BRACU CYBER DETECTIVES

Team Members: Fayruz Tahania Haseen and Anisha Meridha

Understanding the key issues in cybersecurity and consequences of data exposure, team BRACU Cyber Detectives proposed an NGO-led solution that emphasises education, support systems, and partnerships.

The solution looks to initiate targeted campaigns to promote safe device usage, data privacy, and the reporting of cybercrimes, with a particular focus on women and young users. At the same time, it offers a way to establish support networks by partnering with NGOs and community organisations to provide assistance to victims, and collaborate closely with Police Cyber Support for Women in Bangladesh to ensure quicker response times and more victim-friendly procedures.

The team believes that collaboration among NGOs, government agencies, and tech companies are vital to foster a safer digital landscape for all.

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

Can social media help combat gender-based cyber violence?

MEHNAZ IRTIKA

Social media is hailed as a democratising force, giving voices to the voiceless and connecting millions across boundaries. But in Bangladesh, it has also become a breeding ground for gender-based cyber violence, where danger thrives as rapidly as connection. According to the Cyber Crime Awareness Foundation (CCAF), cybercrime in the country doubled to 11.85 percent in just one year. This trend, marked by online harassment, account hacking, and the non-consensual sharing of explicit content, raises an urgent question: can social media evolve from a platform of harm to a tool for justice? The answer lies not in abandoning these platforms but in demanding them to evolve.

The current data paints a grim picture. Among cybercrime victims surveyed by the CCAF between April 2023 and April 2024, 78.78 percent were young adults aged 18 to 30. Children under 18 made up 13.65 percent of the victims while the remaining seven percent included those aged 31 and above. Across victims of all ages, 59 percent are women. Nearly half of them reported losing social standing, 40.15 percent experienced financial loss, and almost all suffered mental anguish. Yet, only 12 percent sought legal refuge, with 87.5 percent saying that their actions did not yield satisfactory outcomes.

These figures underscore two important issues – systemic barriers that stifle justice and the pervasive misuse of social media platforms. According to the study by CCAF, social media and online account hacking tops the list for cybercrimes in Bangladesh, making up 21.65 percent of all incidents. With such dire numbers across most metrics, we must be left to wonder what is being done by the platforms themselves.

Efforts to combat gender-based cyber violence on social media have been mixed. Meta employs artificial intelligence to detect and remove harmful content, TikTok has developed tools to flag harassment, and X has introduced advanced filters to mute abusive messages. However, these technologies often fail to address local nuances, such as language barriers and cultural stigmas. In a country like Bangladesh, where technological literacy varies widely, reliance on global moderation systems has inherent limits. These limitations reveal a pressing need for more localised solutions tailored to specific cultural and linguistic contexts.

Efforts, of course, are being made. Nirmol, the open-source project, provides a microservice-based Application Programming Interface (API) designed to detect offensive language in Bangla and "Banglish", fostering respectful online interactions. Similarly, research efforts such as the study Deep Learning Based Cyberbullying Detection in Bangla Language, published on arXiv by Cornell University, propose advanced models like bidirectional long short-term memory (Bi-LSTM) to identify and address cyberbullying in Bangla social media content. If properly implemented, these initiatives could create safer online spaces.

As Tarazi Mohammed Sheikh, Director of the International Law Students Association, points out, "We must acknowledge, especially in the cyber context, that both genders have a role to play. One way to address this is to begin the conversation at our homes, with our family and friends."

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

Social media's transformative power is evident through campaigns like #MeToo, which empower survivors and demand justice. In Bangladesh, initiatives like Naripokkho's digital safety programmes and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad's advocacy highlight their grassroots-level initiatives that leverage social networks for education. However, as Tahiya Islam, Country Manager of HerWILL, notes, "Current platform policies often fall short in mitigating gender-based cyber violence due to inconsistent enforcement and lack of transparency." Strengthening accountability and scaling such efforts through broader collaboration can create lasting change.

Addressing cyber violence requires stronger legal frameworks and decisive action from cybercrime units to restore trust and ensure victim support. Tahiya emphasises, "Collaborations between platforms, governments, and NGOs can create lasting solutions by combining technology, policy, and grassroots expertise." Joint efforts, including improved reporting systems and educational programmes, are essential to make social media safer.

Tech platforms, too, bear a significant responsibility. Transparency in content moderation practices, investments in human moderators who understand local contexts, and collaborations with civil society organisations are necessary steps. In Bangladesh, platforms must actively promote tools for reporting and blocking abusive content. Collaborative efforts, such as partnerships between Meta and NGOs in South Asia to combat harassment, offer promising models that can be expanded.

Despite 40.9 percent of Bangladeshi cybercrime victims having higher secondary education, digital literacy remains lacking. Tarazi emphasises, "Knowing our basic legal rights and remedies is also important. With our country's ongoing policy and legal reformations, I believe there is ample opportunity to incorporate more rigorous legal provisions in this context and the studies of gender-based violence into the curriculum."

From November 25 to December 10, 2024, the "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence" campaign showcased social media's power to rally global communities against gender-based cyber violence. The UNiTE initiative urged decisive action, calling for perpetrator accountability, zero tolerance for violence, and fully funded National Action Plans. It emphasised investing in prevention and supporting women's rights organisations to ensure survivors receive essential services. This campaign highlighted how collective efforts on networking sites can drive real, measurable change.

Digital platforms can become a powerful tool to combat gender-based cyber violence, but only if we act decisively. The tools exist: localised AI, community-led campaigns, transparent laws, and better moderation. Now, it's about scaling these solutions and enforcing accountability. By prioritising user safety over profits, platforms can transform from enablers of harm into agents of justice. With collaborative efforts and a commitment to justice, transformation is not just possible; it's inevitable.

DAY-LONG "NATIONAL CAREER FAIR 2024" HELD AT STATE UNIVERSITY OF BANGLADESH

The State University of Bangladesh (SUB), in collaboration with Excellence Bangladesh, successfully hosted the "SUB National Career Fair 2024" on December 7, 2024. The event was held at the university's permanent campus in Purbachal and witnessed overwhelming participation from job seekers and leading organisations across the country. More than 50 prominent national and multinational companies, including RFL, Partex Group, Ifad Group, Kazi Food, Chaldal, Zenex Info, Ha-Meem Group, Star Cineplex, 10 Minute School, Dabur, Rupayan Housing, Labaid, Akij Bashir Group, Grameen Danone, Steadfast Courier, IDC BD PLC, Confix, Futurenation, Panjeri Publications, IELTS Excellence, Global Study Limited, Pharmasia, and Acme Group, set up booths to collect resumes and engage with potential candidates. The fair received over 5,000 resumes both in person and through online submissions.

The event began with career-focused sessions and a CV writing workshop for job seekers. The keynote speaker for the career session was renowned corporate and cultural personality Asif Iqbal, the founder of Ganchil Music. The CV writing workshop was conducted by Niaz Ahmed, CEO of Corporate Ask.

A panel discussion titled "Recruiters' Expectations and Bangladesh 2.0 in the Evolving Job Market" was held as part of the career session. Esteemed panelists included Shakil Ahmed Siddique, COO of Kaler Replica Limited; Umme Afia Akter, HR Manager of Ha-Meem Group; Md Kamruzzaman Shobuj, CEO of My Jobs; Humayun Rashid, HR Lead of Confidence Group; Laila Nazneen, Head of HR and Admin at Star Cineplex; and Saiduzzaman Shamim, Senior Consultant at ADB and founder of Sanod.

The inauguration ceremony of the fair was graced by SUB Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr Nawzia Yasmin as the Chief Guest. She said, "We are proud to see the participation of top-tier companies in this initiative by the State University of Bangladesh. This is our first career fair, and we look forward to hosting large-scale events in the future to support job seekers."

Professor Dr Hasan Kawsar, Treasurer of SUB and Special Guest at the event said, "The primary goal of this career fair was to establish a robust network between job seekers and employers, which will significantly contribute to creating future employment opportunities."

The event's "Title Sponsor" was Labaid Cancer Hospital & Super Specialty Center, and the "Powered By Sponsor" was "The News".

BRAC UNIVERSITY ALUMNA receives fellowship for master's at University of Oxford

Fatema Shorna, an alumna of the School of Pharmacy of BRAC University, has started pursuing a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Radiobiology at the University of Oxford after being selected for the IAEA Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme.

Fatema graduated from BRAC University in December 2019 and enrolled for the MSc programme in October 2024 following her selection for the fellowship in November 2023.

The MSc in Radiobiology is a one-year, full-time course designed for individuals interested in a career in academic research in radiobiology or radiation oncology, or in professions that require a knowledge of radiobiology.

Her success underscores BRAC University's mission to empower women, foster excellence, and create global leaders.

The University of Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world and the world's second oldest surviving university. It has an alumni network of over 250,000 individuals, including more than 120 Olympic medalists, 26 Nobel Prize winners, 7 poets laureate, and over 30 modern world leaders including Bill Clinton, Aung San Suu Kyi, Indira Gandhi, and 26 UK prime ministers.

The Marie Sklodowska-Curie Fellowship Programme aims to help increase the number of women in the nuclear field, supporting an inclusive workforce consisting of both men and women who contribute to and drive global scientific and technological innovation.

Selected students receive a scholarship for master's programmes in nuclear-related studies at accredited universities. They are also provided with an opportunity to pursue an internship facilitated by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Scholarships are awarded annually and include tuition and living expenses. In the selection of students, consideration is given to field of study and geographic and linguistic diversity, as well as other factors.

The fellowship also provides unique opportunities, such as Shorna being provided all funds to attend an International Women's Day event at the IAEA Headquarters in Vienna in March 2024.

Reflecting on her achievement, Shorna expressed gratitude for the support she received at BRAC University. Her success underscores BRAC University's mission to empower women, foster excellence, and create global leaders. It also serves as an inspiration for aspiring students seeking to pursue their dreams and excel globally.

IUB hosts book launch event of "Living with Refugees"

The School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (SLASS) at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) launched a book titled *Living with Refugees* on November 28, 2024 at the Multipurpose Hall on campus.

Organised with support from the Department of Social Sciences and Humanities (DSSH), South Asian Studies Centre, TUFS Field Science Commons (TUFiSCo), and ILCAA-Anthropology, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Japan, the event focused on refugee studies and their impacts.

Qudrate Khoda, PhD, Associate Professor of DSSH, served as the Master of Ceremonies and the event was coordinated by Nazia Mahmood PhD, Senior Lecturer. Professor Bokhtiar Ahmed, PhD, Dean of SLASS, opened the event with a welcome address. The book, published by The University Press Limited (UPL), was edited by Professor Ranjan Saha Partha (Jahangirnagar University), Obaydullah Al Marzuk (IUB), and Professor Masahiko Togawa (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies). It contains contributions from 19 researchers from Bangladesh and abroad.

OPINION

What institutional pride conceals

SADMAN AHMED

Institutional pride is an attitude seen among the students and alumni of educational institutions which are generally considered "elite" and have demand in the eyes of concerned parents and ambitious students. It's hard to pinpoint where the love for one's alma mater ends and where the toxic attitude of institutional pride begins. Nevertheless, this attitude represents one of the glaring problems in the education system of Bangladesh – the inequality in access to quality education.

Despite being one of the most important growth factors in today's world, education has always taken a backseat in Bangladesh. Yes, the general public is aware of the value of education and the number of school-going children has increased in recent decades. However, at the same time, the quality of education has been a subject of controversy, drawing criticism from various intellectuals who have been working with the education system and policy. However, the opinions of these intellectuals and educationalists aren't considered when the government fixes its yearly budget, as can be seen through the lacklustre budget for the educational sector for all recent fiscal years.

Despite the financial limitations, certain institutions deliver a somewhat better education to their students than others. These institutions also have a great history to boast about; many are from the British period. The alumni of these institutions have been successful in Bangladesh and abroad, and their successes are held to be a testament to the successes of the institutions themselves. Usually, there is tough competition to get into these institutions. For reasons just discussed, they are treated as elite and superior by both parents and students. All these factors lead to a toxic attitude amongst students who study at these places. Known colloquially as "institutional pride", this attitude is an almost borderline superiority complex for being able to study at these institutions. In many cases, the teachers of these institutions also perpetuate this pride for various reasons.

Love and appreciation for one's institution aren't new or harmful. One's school or college can and should play an important role in shaping them. The schools, colleges, and universities which are most notorious for having students with this institutional pride are generally good. They provide better education and co-curricular activities. The students of these places tend to do better academically because of these opportunities. Appreciating these practices isn't wrong or unethical; they are indeed praiseworthy. The issues begin when the students don't realise that the facilities they experience are a privilege in a country like Bangladesh, and they end up displaying an obnoxious level of pride only because they study at that institution, which sometimes leads to demeaning other institutions.

Many institutions don't have an adequate number of teachers, let alone qualified ones. An institution's performance might be hampered due to involvement with local politics. The students at many places might not get a chance to participate in co-curricular activities, like different Olympiads, where they can shine. These aren't individual faults of anyone, but a systemic failure, where the education system has not been able to provide quality education to everyone, irrespective of their class or social status. These shortcomings have to be discussed and addressed. In this environment, displaying empty institutional pride doesn't benefit anyone and only helps strengthen the system that reinforces these inequalities.

These inequalities should also be addressed to reduce the unhealthy competition during the admission season. Most of the institutions in Bangladesh don't have a system through which the full potential of the student can be assessed during admission. In many cases, the background of parents is also considered or the parents might have to take a viva exam during the admission process, which might be a barrier for many students coming from underprivileged backgrounds. The lottery system for admission is also a dire problem that results in many deserving students facing exclusion from educational opportunities they would otherwise have qualified for.

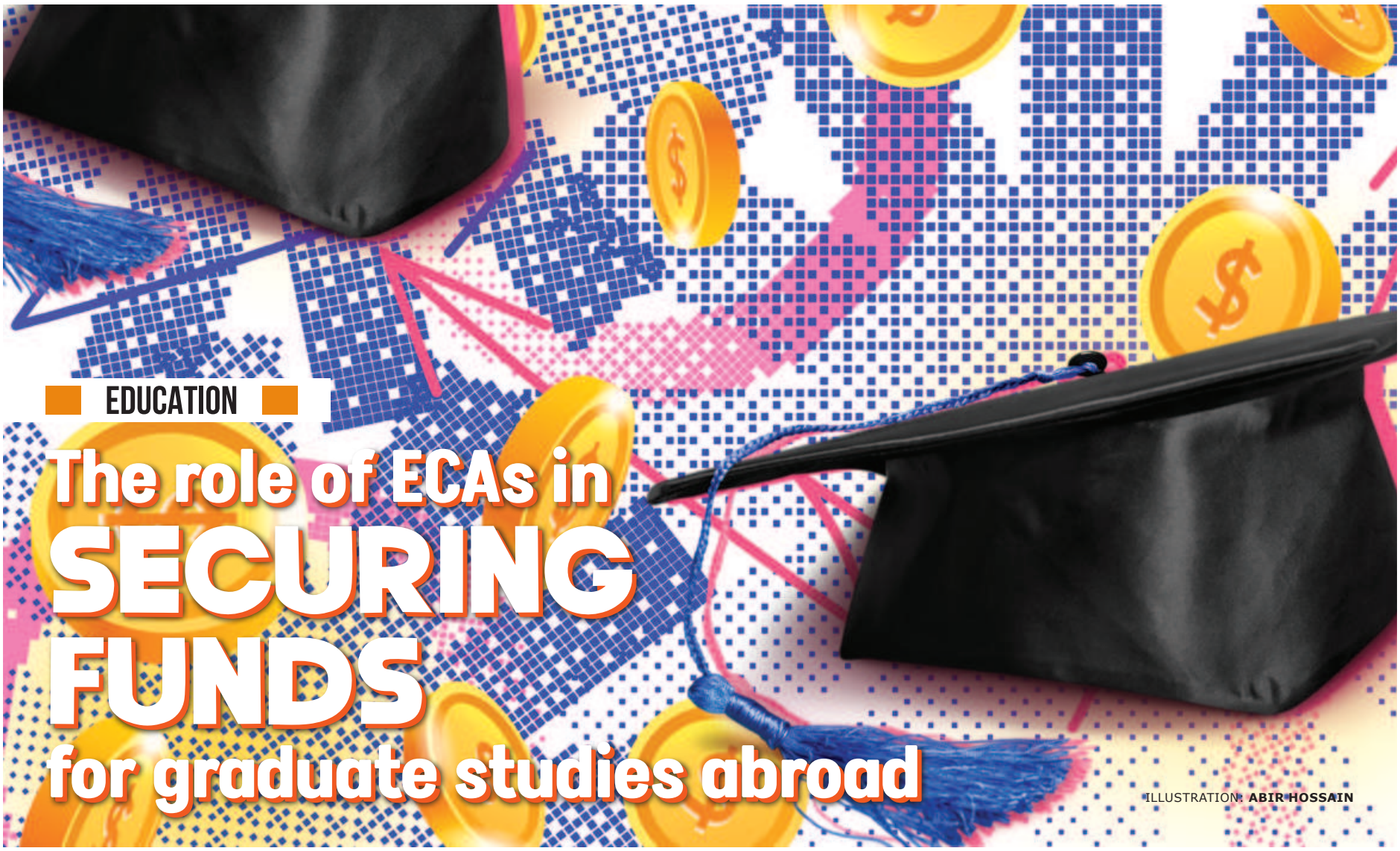
These discrepancies must be addressed, and better admission criteria and considerations must be introduced. However, reform cannot stop at the admission phase. It's also crucial to ensure that a child can get a quality education in whichever institution they get admitted to. Similarly, universities across the nation should be developed and bettered. The reason parents and students are anxious about getting into one or two particular universities (whether general, medical, or engineering) is because of the better facilities they provide. This leads to ugly competition in many cases. Reducing the inequality in education quality would, at least to some degree, ensure parents and students that they won't fall behind others even if they don't gain admission to those top few institutes.

This isn't to morally condemn the students who have institutional pride. It is to remind them of their privilege in the current education system of Bangladesh. It is to make them understand that superiority complex due to studying at a particular institution and demeaning others because of it isn't conducive to anything; it is only a sign of disrespect and unawareness towards the unequal access to education across the country.

Yes, even after all our efforts, every institution probably won't be equal. It might not be possible to separate one's access to education from their socio-economic reality. Still, by making proper policies and allocations, it is possible to take a step towards that direction. Everyone deserves to be proud of their institution, not just a select few.

Sadman Ahmed is a student at the Islamic University of Technology.

ILLUSTRATION: **ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM**



EDUCATION

The role of ECAs in SECURING FUNDS for graduate studies abroad

ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**

FARIHA LAMISA

Back when I had just gotten into university, I was advised by well-meaning seniors, classmates, and acquaintances to be involved in extracurricular activities (ECAs). The motive behind the advice was nothing but noble, as all of them believed that in order to have a shot at securing a potential scholarship or funding as a graduate student abroad, my involvement in ECAs would help.

It cannot be denied that exposure to extracurricular activities can help an undergraduate student explore their interests while also providing other benefits. However, the notion that involvement with extra-curricular activities makes one eligible for graduate funding is hardly the truth.

In 2023, Sajid Hasnat received the Center for Growth and Opportunity (CGO) Fellowship to pursue a Master of Science in Economics degree at Utah State University. As an undergraduate student of BRAC University, Sajid was involved with multiple extracurricular activities. According to him, however, it was his academics that played the most crucial role in his profile rather than the activities. Sajid said, "I scraped off all my ECA achievements and only kept my research and academic engagements in the application."

Nonetheless, the experience may not be entirely similar for most prospective graduate candidates.

Jumana Akhter Tanuja, who received the Excellence Scholarship & Opportunity Programme (ESOP) from ETH Zurich Foundation in 2024 after finishing her undergraduate education at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), thinks that although academics may have played a key role in securing the scholarship, her extracurriculars also helped.

"Professors in STEM fields tend to focus on your academic and research capabilities first and foremost. Having a strong academic CV always comes first. Once you check the primary boxes with great academic results and research activities, the selection committee might then look at what else you bring to the table. This is where extracurriculars come into play. You need to present your extracurricular activities in a way that demonstrates your versatility," she said.

"On the other hand, an applicant can also show their commitment to the programme purely through exceptional academic achievements. Ultimately, the choice between these two approaches depends entirely on the individual, their strengths and weaknesses, and the specific programme they are applying to," Jumana explained.

However, Tahsin Tabassum, who completed her undergraduate degree in English at East West University and received a Global Academic Excellence International Scholarship in 2024 from the University of Adelaide for a Master of Education (MEd), says that CGPA was enough to partially finance her graduate studies through scholarship.

She said, "In my case, I received a scholarship based primarily on my CGPA. While extracurriculars are beneficial, they're not always required. For some funding opportunities, a strong GPA or academic focus can stand on its own as a significant asset."

Furthermore, Jumana warned against joining multiple clubs simply for the sake of quantity in the extracurricular field. "Spreading oneself too thin across many clubs without meaningful contributions might actually work against you. What truly matters is the quality of your involvement and how it aligns with your overall interests and goals. If you actively participate in one or two clubs that resonate with your interests and aspirations, it can make a significant difference – not just for a graduate application, but also for your overall career preparation," she stated.

Nevertheless, each scholarship has a different set of requirements. For some, extracurricular activities may play a role. However, unlike undergraduate admission decisions, where significant achievements in an extra-curricular field could compensate for an academic lag, it may not be the case when applying to graduate schools.

Sajid said, "Your CGPA, standardised test scores, research work (publications or honours theses), and letters of recommendation should matter more than anything else. I think that's true for a large majority of programmes. It also depends on which country you are applying to."

> **"In my case, I received a scholarship based primarily on my CGPA. While extracurriculars are beneficial, they're not always required. For some funding opportunities, a strong GPA or academic focus can stand on its own as a significant asset."**

Of course, for disciplines that focus on creative fields, like Visual Arts or Journalism, having a good CGPA and test scores alone might not be enough. These programmes often require you to have a solid portfolio of your work and, in some cases, work experience as well. For such programmes, ECAs do matter as these activities can help you meet the requirements.

Despite these differences, one thing can be inferred: if an undergraduate student is aiming to study abroad for a graduate degree with some financing from the university, your CGPA will matter. While extracurricular activities may be important, it tends to play a secondary role in the case of graduate studies.